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ABSTRACT

A classroom study investigated the extent of rhetorical transfer in the writing of four Japanese students in a college-level sheltered English-as-a-Second-Language course. Most of the writing assignments from the first 10 weeks of class were analyzed for the number of sentences and clauses in each paragraph (other than introductory, concluding, and very short) were counted and the paragraphs analyzed for patterns of development. Results revealed that inductive development was the norm, with 41 of 63 paragraphs beginning with supporting sentences and ending in a topic sentence. Of the three patterns of development (direct, pivoting, suspended) specified in the course textbook, the direct pattern was least common, the suspended pattern most common. The findings explained to the teacher some of the differences in the writing of Japanese students. Contains 30 references. (MSE)

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JAPANESE RHETORICAL TRANSFER IN FRESHMAN COMP

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I. Introduction

Teaching is problem solving, as Darling-Hammond (1997) reminds us.

> . . . new programs . . . envision the professional teacher as one who learns from teaching rather than one who has finished learning how to teach, and the job of teacher education as developing the capacity to inquire sensitively and sytematically into the nature of learning and the effects of teaching. This is an approach to knowledge production like that John Dewey (1929) sought -- one that aims to empower teachers with greater understanding of complex situations rather than to control teachers with simplistic formulas or cookie-cutter routines for teaching. (pp. 321-322)

In this paper I would like to share the results of classroom research spurred by an influx of Japanese students into a sheltered section of Freshman Comp I had been teaching at Lehman College, the City University of New York's senior college in the Bronx.

At the same time that I began teaching at Lehman in 1990, CUNY Lehman Hiroshima College was founded with the help of a grant from a Japanese businessman. All 326 Japanese freshman that semester began in a five-level ESL Program which paralleled Lehman's. In Lehman Hiroshima's progam (which was to close, with the college, in 1994), typically students took four semesters to acquire the skills which would enable them to pass the CUNY basic skills assessment tests. Afterwards, most would continue their English language instruction in the Bronx campus' two-semester freshman composition sequence.

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These Japanese students posed new challenges to Lehman's English composition faculty on several levels. Neither native nor immigrant and distinctly middle-class, they were unlike the rest of Lehman's student body. They spoke a language that was considerably more distant from English than that of the majority of Lehman's ESL students, who were Dominican; furthermore, they had probably had more training in L1 writing than the typical Lehman ESL student, who has often had interruptions in her schooling. Teachers were not sure what to expect from them and how they might have to modify their teaching. In Fall 1993, I had several of these students in each of the two composition courses I was teaching. Most of them had been studying English for years even before entering Lehman Hirsoshima. Nevertheless, I found some of their essays exceptionally difficult to read.

II. Review of Literature

In his seminal study involving approximately 600 student essays, Kaplan (1966) characterized differences among patterns of paragraph development "across cultures" (See Figure 1).

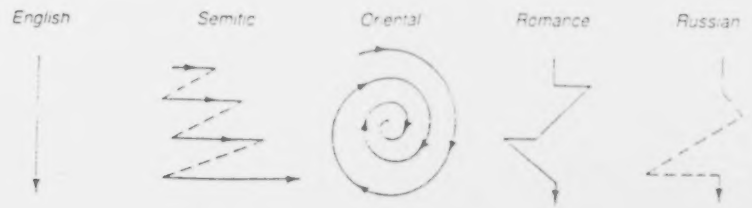

Figure 1. (Kaplan, 1966, p. 15)

Kaplan explained the circle that he used to characterize "oriental"[1] writing by stating:

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> In this kind of writing, the development of the paragraph may be said to be 'turning and turning in a widening gyre.' The circles or gyres turn around the subject and show it from a variety of tangential view, but the subject is never looked at directly. Things are developed in terms of what they are not, rather than in terms of what they are. (p. 10)

More recently, Kobayashi (1984) has considered differences between the way American and Japanese college students develop paragraphs in response to different writing tasks. In the U.S, she collected English writing samples from American college students (AEA) and Japanese students studying English as a second language (JEA). In Japan, she collected English writing samples from Japanese students majoring in English (JEJ) and Japanese writing samples in Japan from students who were not (JJJ). Her analysis revealed that Japanese students were less likely to begin a paragraph with a general statement followed by specific details (GS), which is the dominant pattern for Americans, and more likely to begin a paragraph with specific details and end with a generalization (SG). However, the Japanese students in the U.S. were closer to the American students than those in Japan. Indeed, Japanese ESL students were just as unlikely to omit general statements as were American students (See Figure 2).

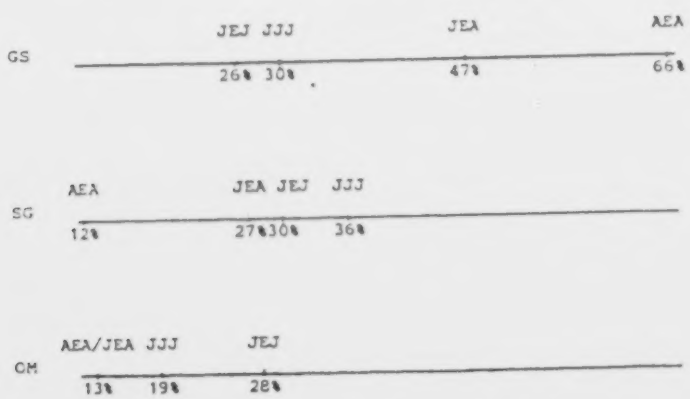

Figure 2. (Kobayashi, 1984, p. 176)

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A number of other studies also indicate that that Japanese rhetoric is more likely to proceed inductively (see Kubota, 1992; Oi, 1984). It has been argued that the relative homogeny of Japanese culture, has made it possible for the Japanese to communicate with each other less directly, more implicitly, than is customary in more homogeneous cultures. It is a culture of "high context" (Hall, 1977), in which the interlocutor is trusted to draw the intended conclusions (Condon & Yousef, 1975). Although there has been more criticism recently of the reification of Japanese and American cultural differences (Kachru, 1997; Kubota, 1997, 1999), there tends to be agreement that, to the extent that they do exist, departure from rhetorical norms may have negative consequences for the ESL student (Reid, 1989; Land & Whitley, 1989).

III. Method

Seven Lehman Hiroshima students enrolled in the courses I was teaching in the Lehman's Freshman Composition Program in Fall, 1993. Two eventually stopped attending, one shortly after the semester began and another mid-semester. Another student had serious problets with plagiarism and was unable to complete her work by term's end. The four remaining students became the subjects of this study.

Two, Masafumi and Yoko, were in the lower level (ENG090) of the two-tiered composition sequence obligatory for most Lehman students.[1] At that time, the class was composed only of those students who had recently passed the Writing Assessment Test (WAT) or were repeating the course. That semester, students were reading *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* (Tyler, 1982). The other two students,

Yoshi and Seiko, were in the upper level of the sequence (ENG102), in which *Elements of Argument* (Rottenberg, 1994) served as the reader.

In both tiers, students had to regularly write essays. In ENG102 students also had to write a research paper and pass a common final, the College Writing Examination. All writing assignments were done at home. In both classes, I emphasized form and did not discuss coherence or patterns of development at any length before the data collection had been completed. It was my sixth semester teaching ENG102 and my fifth teaching ENG090.

All of the work from the first ten weeks of the class, twenty-nine essays, at least seven from each student, was collected and analyzed. Three narrative essays, which followed distinct patterns of development, were excluded from the study. Photocopies of two of Masafumi's essays were illegible. One of Yoshi's essays which had exceedingly long paragraphs, averaging twenty-three sentences was excluded. The twenty-three remaining essays constituted the corpus.

For this study, paragraphing was considered to correspond with indentation. Introductory and concluding paragraphs, which typically follow distinct patterns of development (Crews, Schor & Hennessy, 1993, p. 107), were excluded from the study. The number of sentences and clauses in each of the other paragraphs were then counted and all paragraphs with fewer than three sentences were also eliminated. Sixty-three paragraphs were analyzed for patterns of development.

The terms "topic sentence" and "supporting sentence" are used rather than "generalization" and "specific detail".

> As a rule, every effective paragraph has a leading idea to which all other ideas in the paragraph are logically related. A reader should be able to tell, in any paragraph, which is the main sentence (often called topic sentence) -- the sentence containing that one central point to be developed or otherwise supported in the paragraph. (Crews, Schor & Hennessy, 1993, p. 89)

In the examples below, sentences coded as topic sentences have been italicized.

Paragraphs beginning with a topic sentence and followed by supporting sentences were labeled TS (see example # 1).

Example #1 - TS (Yoko)
re: grading of student papers

> *Also, I develop and encourage myself when I get a grade.* The reason for this is if I grasp my grade, I can improve it. When I took HIS250 in Japan campus, I took "C" about first composition. In the circutstance, I studied hard and saw HIS250 teacher. Then, I could get a better grade than before. Also I could understand about the class content deeply.

Those beginning with supporting sentences and ending in a topic sentence were labeled ST (see Example #2).

Example # 2 - ST (Masafumi)
re: divorce

> Today, many people get divorced. On the other hand, such a divorce is increasing children who do not have the other of parents. When the man and the woman live without loving each other, they will feel pain, but their children also feel pain as well they do. I believe that most children hate to live with the other of parents. The man and the woman do not also love each other but children love both parents. The man and the woman should not get divorced without thinking about their children and ask for their children about their divorce. *Moreover, if it is possible for the man and the woman keep living with each others without loving each others, they should try to love each other onecemore and keep the marriage life.*

Those in which the topic sentence was preceded and followed by specific details were labeled STS (see Example #3).

Example # 3 - STS (Seiko)
re: marriage and sacrifice

> People grow up in different environment, culture, or religion. Their habits and attitudes have already developed in childhood. *If a couple is married, he/she will need to change his habits to survive in a marriage.* For example, if a husband is western people and his wife is Japanese, she will ask him to take his shoes off at an entrance. He will has to change his old habits.

In addition, there there were a number of paragraphs which did not fit into any of these categories in that they began and ended with the same generalization. These paragraphs were labeled TST (see Example #4):

Example #4 TST (Seiko)
re: relationship between neatness in language and dress

> *As for language, I believe everyone has to speak English in proper way.* When they have an interview to enter a company, they have to speak neat and clean English. I think the porpuse of CWE is also to check our English gramer. In case of interviews and CWE, we have to know correct English. If people communicate in chopped-up phrases, it bothers somebody because he/she may not understand about what they are talking. *I believe it is important for everybody to learn and speak good English.*

It has been acknowledged that the identification of "topic sentences" can be difficult and subjective (Braddock ,1974). Paragraphs were always coded in the context of the entire essay. This coding was probably facilitated by the fact that most essay topics were teacher assigned and clearly delineated. Coding was probably further facilitated by the length of the paragraphs studied, which averaged 7 sentences, 11 clauses. Longer paragraphs probably would have had more "subtopics" and the main idea of shorter paragraphs might have been difficult to ascertain. Diachronic reliability (Kirk & Miller, 1986) was enhanced by the fact that paragraphs were coded first in 1993 and then once more, for this study, in 1999. All paragraphs were found to have a topic sentence.

III. Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed that inductive development was the norm, with 41 out of 63 paragraphs beginning with supporting sentences and ending in a topic

sentence (65%). Ten of 63 paragraphs began with a topic sentence, continued with specifics and ended with a rephrasing of the same topic sentence (16%). There were also 7 paragraphs which began and ended with supporting details and had a topic sentence in the middle. Only one student had any paragraphs which began with a topic sentence and even she used this pattern less often than the inductive pattern.

Student/class avg. para. length	Total # para	Kinds of Paragraph Development TS	ST	STS	TST
Masafumi/ ENG090 4 sentences/ 8 clauses	17		15 (88%)	2 (12%)	
Yoko/ ENG090 7 sentences/ 11 clauses	17	5 (29%)	10 (59%)		2 (12%)
Seiko/ ENG102 5 sentences/ 8 clauses	14		7 (50%)	2 (14%)	5 (36%)
Yoshi/ENG102 10 sentences/ 16 clauses	15		9 (60%)	3 (20%)	3 (20%)
Total	63	**5 (8%)**	**41(65%)**	**7 (11%)**	**10 (16%)**

That semester's composition text, *The Borzoi Handbook*, presented three patterns of development: "direct", "pivoting" and "suspended" (Crews, Schor, & Hennessy, 1993, pp. 101-111). In this corpus, the direct pattern, described as "the most usual" and presented first, occurred least often; the suspended pattern, described as a "pattern that repays practice" and presented last, appeared most often; and the pivoting pattern, described as beginning with "limiting sentences", only clearly corresponded with Masafumi's two STS paragraphs, not with the five others in the corpus. The TST pattern, second most common, was not discussed at all. Other handbooks that I used over a period of years in Lehman's Freshman Composition Program either did not acknowledge this pattern (Levin, 1991; Perrin, 1993) or gave it little importance (Hacker, 1995; Troyka, 1993).

Repetition, in one form or another, is generally acknowledged to be a cohesive device. Reynolds (1996) observes that East Asian writers are more likely throughout an essay to repeat propositions, possibly to promote coherence in writing that is also typically less linear. And at least one composition handbook presents the repetition of the topic sentence at beginning and end of paragraph as an emphatic device (Lunsford & Connors, 1995). Nevertheless, my reading of some of the TST paragraphs, especially the shorter ones, was marked by cognitive dissonance. It was this redundancy that rendered the text less coherent for me as a reader, not the high frequency of induction. As Barthes (1977) observed, "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (p. 148).

> A piece of writing may be considered unified when it contains *nothing* superfluous and it omits nothing essential to the achievement of purpose . . . A work is considered coherent when the sequence of its parts . . . is controlled by some principle which is meaningful to the reader. (Hughes & Duhamel, 1962, quoted in Kaplan, 1966, p. 5).

Research also indicates that, in general, less proficient writers are more likely to repeat themselves (Ferris, 1994; Reynolds, 1996). Indeed, much of what the English-speaking reader considers to be bad writing may indeed just be a reflection of writing skills that are as underdeveloped in the first language (Cumming, 1989; Jones & Tetroe, 1987). However, I would like to suggest that this redundancy might instead be negative transfer of training (Kellerman, 1977) either from prior Japanese or American teachers.

The deductive pattern has been recommended since WWII by prominent Japanese scholars and Japanese compositions developed deductively have tended to be rated more highly by university professors than those which are not (Kubota, 1992, 1997). Is it then possible that the TST pattern, which combines elements of

both inductive and deductive development, is the reflection of an attempt to conform to the newest rhetorical recipe while retaining more traditional patterns ingrained through years of exposure?

Another possibility exists as well. In preparing students for the CUNY WAT, many ESL faculty have taught formulas such as the following which I once copied from the blackboard during a classroom observation.

5 paragraph essay

1. Intro: state thesis fully (I believe that . . .)
2. reason #1 + details
3. reason #2 + details
4. reason #3 + details
5. conclusions.

The first sentence of the paragraph should state the reason, followed by a specific example/details to support the reason.

It is easy to see how such bald prescriptions might also result in the type of redundancy evident in this study. ESL teachers should be aware that readers of English do not necessarily prefer deductive patterns of paragraph development; controlling ideas can be implied, or assembled through more than one sentence; and that ESL students may be able to transfer other effective patterns of paragraph development which they have learned and/or been exposed to in their countries of origin. By treating our students as *tabulae rasae*, we not only ignore the possibility of positive transfer but we also risk going further to actually interfere with productive strategies they have developed in their first language or as learners of a second language.

IV. Conclusions

In order to generalize from the findings of this study, a larger sampling and a comparison with different groups of native and non-native speakers would be

necessary. It is also difficult to relate these findings to other studies which did not employ comparable methods of data collection or analysis. This study was the response of an ESL specialist to a pedagogical conundrum in Freshman Comp. Analysis of the linguistic data enabled me to uncover the solution to the mystery of what was so different in the writing of my Japanese students from Lehman Hiroshima and to become more aware of this phenomenon in future classes.

Land and Whitley (1989) argue that, in a society which is becoming more pluralistic, we should not ask students to adopt American rhetorical patterns; Reid (1989) disagrees, urging a frank discussion in which students are encouraged to do so for pragmatic reasons. I try to give each student the individual feedback that I feel she needs. At times, this involves suggesting a clearer delineation of topic, often to compensate for the increased reading difficulty engendered by an accumulation of surface error. However, I feel it is also important to discuss issues of coherence in a multi-textured manner, to expose all students to a variety of models, and to acknowledge that cultural diversity can enrichen the experience of reading and of writing.

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[1] Although a large number of the papers Kaplan analyzed were written by Japanese students, Kaplan's analysis of "oriental" is limited to Chinese and Korean.
[2] Only students who have scored a 10 or above in the WAT or who are in the Adult Degree Program are exempted from this class.

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